

The Quilted Petticoat

By Sidney Herschel Small

ILLUSTRATED BY DONALD TEAGUE

The story of Lucky John Fredericks and Ann Mathews, in the days when young America moved westward

THE storm roared down across the prairie. It was so black that Council Rock, a sanctuary westward, vanished completely, and John Fredericks knew it couldn't be reached. The end of the wagon train, to the east, was already blotted from sight. Rain slashed his face as he urged his horse back along the line of ox-drawn vehicles bound for gold and California. The wagons must be brought together, in a circle.

Lightning crackled, thunder crashed. John Fredericks saw a wagon overturned, somewhere near the position Ann Mathews and her father should be riding, but there was "California or Bust" painted on the canvas, and he knew it wasn't Mathews'.

Fredericks tried to shout orders for haste, but the wind whipped the words away. He shifted his Sharpe's rifle so that it was under his arm, and tried to hurry the wagon-drivers with gestures.

The fury of the wind from the Rockies was diabolical.

A man on horseback hammered past him, shouting, and the faint sound carried on it a woman's scream, shrill, terrified.

It had been too easy, this march across a prairie

thick with buffalo grass and spangled with wild onion. There had been too little trouble. Antelope, buffalo, had supplied fresh meat, and if the wolves had howled at night, it meant that no Indians were near. The gashed and rugged peaks of the Rockies had come into vision without one single death in the emigrant train. Lucky John Fredericks. People were calling him that; many wagons had waited a full two weeks to go with him, although this was only his third venture. He had been a common teamster on his first, until death had made it necessary for someone to assume leadership.

It had been a pleasant shock to find Ann Mathews.

Her father had done the explaining. "Don't think I'm after gold. We intend to make a new type of wagon. Stronger," he told John Fredericks, "and faster. It is needed. The only way to make a good

The dying woman spoke. Clearly. "Good-year's Bar," she said, and then, "My petticoat. Don't let them bury it, Ann. It's yours"

one is to see what's wrong with these. I hope you'll give me advice, and then return to Concord and supervise manufacture. You were a steady boy until adventure got into your head."

Mathews saw no danger in allowing Ann to accompany him. It was believed, in Concord, that the tales of hunger and Indians were exaggerated. What could possibly happen in crossing a prairie, climbing a hill?

John Fredericks was glad that nothing had happened. The nearest to trouble was much the sort of thing you'd find at home: a man hanging around another's wife. If John had been looking about, there were other women he'd have picked, especially if he'd been Randolph King in broadcloth—King was easily the best-dressed man, and best-mounted, in the train. His whiskers were glossy and black. Twice Fredericks had stepped between King and the woman's husband, insisting that there must be no fighting until the journey was over.

IT HAD been marvelous to ride slowly beside Ann's wagon through the long, golden days.

An hour before the sky darkened, he had been walking with her, not in the wheel-marked trail, but beside it. "All of the people who are supposed to've died," Ann had said, "and never a grave. It's just a tale."

"The graves are here," said John Fredericks.

"Where?"

"It doesn't matter," Fredericks said.

"And California's just another tale. I wouldn't stay in California."

"You mean," he said, "there's no man you'd stay in California for?"

"I didn't say that," Ann said.

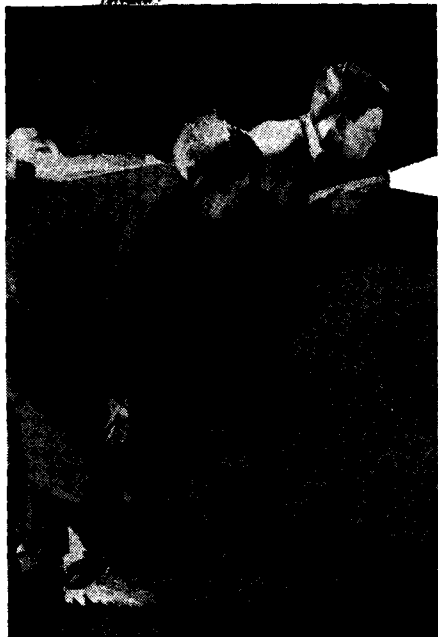
He had, then, taken her hand, and she'd allowed it. He tried to say what he intended without blurting it out, by leading up to it. "Of course," he said eagerly, "you needn't have come along—"

Before he could continue, Ann Mathews had pulled away. Scorn was in her eyes; the look she gave him was like a slap. . . .

The rain slapped at him now, the wind raged. The thunder rolled, peal on peal, without pause. Through the sound, Fredericks heard several sharp cracks. No blinding flash followed. Only an infinitesimal yellow-red stab of light.

Thunder blared tremendously, rolled, quieted down, as the guide strove to see what was happening; then, to make his heart (*Continued on page 85*)





June Spoon

By Henry Anton Steig

How Hilda Hofmeister disgraced her brother by falling in love. A story which shows that men must—and do—stick together

THE street rang to the squeals of loud children, of all sizes but the smallest. Mothers were indoors with infants and baby carriages, preparing, in their kitchens, for wage-earners who were returning home from the L station, a few blocks away, for rest and nourishment. Some hurried; others walked slowly, heads bent over newspapers, managing by a specially developed sense to avoid collisions with the children, the fire hydrants, the telegraph poles and the ash cans. Now and then a truck clattered over the cobbles, leaving behind a sharp, stinging smell of hot oil and rubber.

On one side of the street a public park began, with a steep, forty-foot bank of earth and rock which cast toward the row of tenement houses, on the other side, a steadily-advancing, crazy-edged shadow. In this shadow, on a flat ledge at the base of the hill, sat four boys of pre-high-school age, seemingly oblivious of the seethings in the street. They were members of The Barracudas, one of dozens of local juvenile athletic clubs. The baseball season was in full swing and they had come down from the improvised diamond in the park, where they had been holding infield practice, to rest and chat.

Otto Hofmeister, star pitcher of the team, stretched out his right arm, importantly, and turned it back and forth. He was a brown-haired, gray-eyed boy, of average height for his thirteen years, and so slim that the others had always wondered where was hidden the strength to impart to his delivery the speed and control that had made him famous.

"How's duh wing?" Iggy Koudelka, the catcher, asked.

"Guess I got mosta duh kinks odduvit," Otto said. "You din' have no easy time holdin' onta dose straight ones."

"Who, me?" Iggy said. "I could hole twice whatchoo got!" He punched his catcher's mitt. "Trouble was I ain't got dis pocket broken in right, yet." He spat into the mitt and massaged it with the heel of his hand.

"Whatta hella you doin'?" Cockeye Potter said. He was first baseman, manager of the team and president of the club and he was called "Cockeye" because he was cockeyed—just so that there could be no mistake about it. "Spit ain' no good. It cracks duh leather." He took his glove out of his back pocket. "Here, looka dis! Slick, ain't it? Wanna know duh secret?"

"Yeah, tell me."

"I wouldn', on'y it's fuh duh gooda duh club," Cockeye said, magnanimously. "Duh whole secret is budder. It feeds duh leather, 'steada crackin' it. About once a week, rub in a liddle dab."

"Budder? But don' it get stinky?"

"Yeah, a liddle, but what's de odds? Whatta hell, you wanna keep yuh mitt in shape, don'tcha?"

"Whadda you use?" Iggy asked Otto.

"Nuttin'," Otto said, with a gesture of disdain.

"'N' how 'boutchoo?" Iggy said to Nick Boscarelli, the shortstop of the team.

But Nick wasn't thinking of baseball and he failed to answer the question. He took a half cigarette out of his pocket, straightened it, lit it, inhaled deeply, and blew a cloud of smoke upward with an experienced air. "June—spoon," he said, to no one in particular. "Dere'll be big doin's up duh park ta-night. 'N' I got 'n idea. We could have some fun."

"Yeah?" the others asked.

"Four is almos' too many, but if yuh do what I tellya, maybe it'll woik. Dis is de idea: we're gawna be a investigation committee, like. Lissen!" The four heads bent close.

"So dat's where you been keepin' yuhself, nights!" Otto said with a wise grin.

"Otto-o-O!" in a high-pitched scream came from a third-story window opposite them. Mrs. Hofmeister had been calling her son every few minutes for almost a half-hour. This time there was real anger in her voice and Otto thought he'd better obey.

"I'll be righd up, Mom," he yelled. Then, to his friends, he said: "De ole lady wants me fuh supper. Where'll we meet?"

"Unner duh poplar tree, eight o'clock. Bring yuh soichlight and don' be late!" Nick said.

OTTO dashed across the street, ignoring traffic, hopped over a fire plug, up the stoop and into his house.

Mr. and Mrs. Hofmeister and Otto's older sister, Hilda, were in the kitchen. Mr. Hofmeister was cutting some bread, Mrs. Hofmeister was ladling out portions of soup, and Hilda, having set the table, was sitting at it. She was all spruced up, and in a temper. The door slammed and they heard the padding of Otto's athletic shoes in the hall. As soon as he had shown his face in the kitchen doorway, Hilda, beating her parents to the draw, crossly said, "Can't you ever come home on time once, pest?"

"Aw, I came just as soon as Mom called," Otto said.

"You're a liar! Mom's been yellin' her head off for an hour."

Otto looked at his father and mother but there was no sympathy there and as Hilda went on scolding, he stepped into the bathroom to wash up. Most of the time he hated Hilda. She was a big, stalwart, aggressively healthy girl who looked about twenty though she had just turned seventeen. Easily Otto's superior, physically, she continually bossed him about and made home life for him one long humiliation. Once or twice, goaded beyond endurance, he had retaliated with a slap, but it didn't pay; it only brought his parents to Hilda's aid. It wasn't that they didn't love Otto—age and sex were to be respected, that

